

An approach on Japan's government policy to raise a global leader

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Summary

We examine Japan's government policy to raise a global leader in this previous issue. This time we propose an approach to raise a global leader. We focus to improve English ability. According to a study on TOEFL Score ranking (ETS, 2010), Japan's ranking is 135th out of 163 countries in the world. It is 27th out of 30 countries in Asia. We propose an approach to improve this score: to introduce English education at nursery schools and explain this by the recent brain studies and propose a practical teaching way based on our empirical English teaching experiences.

keywords : Global leader, English education, Brain study

Now we have faced a global economy since Berlin's Wall breakdown in 1989. We have one economy rather than two economies (capitalist worlds and communist ones) before. The main type of international economic dealings has shifted from trade to FDI (Foreign Direct Investment). The new phenomenon of this shift is people's movement. When people move among countries, they need to speak a common language, which is English now. However, Japanese English ability is so low, based on TOEFL ranking, "in the world 135th out of 163, in Asia 27th out of 30", (ETS, 2010). According to Swiss IMD, 2012 International Competitiveness Ranking, Japan's weak point is English education (IMD, 2012).

In this paper (1) we explain problems of Japan's government policy to raise a global leader, (2) we propose to introduce English education at nursery schools (not including kindergartens because nursery school open 6 days, Monday to Saturday) and explain the reason by the recent brain studies, (3) we propose a practical way to teach English at nursery

schools based on our teaching experiences. (4) We explain conclusion and future research.

(1) The problems of Japan's government policy to raise a global leader

Japan's government decided to have the strategy to raise a global leader at the Promotion Committee to raise a global leader on June 4, 2012 (Japan, 2012). This shows factors which a global leader should have as follows: factor 1 (language ability and communication ability), factor 2 (positive attitude, challenge spirit, cooperation, flexibility, responsibility and commitment) and factor 3 (cross-cultural understanding and Japanese identity). In order to raise a global leader who has above factors, this strategy asked the educational societies and the industrial ones to solve their problems. In the educational societies, this strategy shows the first group (from elementary to senior high school) and the second group (colleges and universities). In the first group, this strategy states to strengthen English education. Here is a problem. This strategy does not include nursery schools.

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English education should start from nursery schools. We explain why, based on recent brain studies and our empirical teaching English experiences.

(2) Why we should start English education from nursery schools?

Any language consists of sounds and letters. When a baby is born, the baby starts to get sounds from mothers rather than letters. The baby's listening ability is very good. The recent brain studies show this. For example, OECD project group (OECD, 2007) shows brain studies are important to learn foreign languages. "There is an inverse relationship between age and the effectiveness of learning many aspects of language – in general, the younger the age of exposure, the more successful the learning – and neuroscience has started to identify how the brain processes language differently among young children compared with more mature people. This understanding is relevant to education policies especially regarding foreign language instruction which often does not begin adolescence. Adolescents and adults, of course, can also learn a language anew, but it presents greater difficulties." (OECD 2007, P.15)

Tokyo University Professor, Kuniyoshi Sakai (Sakai, 2002) shows brain science is important to learn English. If we can learn both Japanese and English by the age of 6, we can learn both languages.

President Nakajima of International Liberal Arts University in Akita (Nakajima, 2011) shows "Plural Language Policy in Europe" and "Chinese Translator in Edo Period". According to "Plural Language Policy in Europe", If we learn plural languages, they stimulate each other and improve mother tongue. According to a material of "Chinese Translator in Edo Period", Chinese translators should be raised by the age of 9. This

is related to brain studies and critical period hypothesis.

Critical period Hypothesis of English (Modern Chemistry, 1997) is said to exist during 6 to 9 years old. Thus we propose to teach English sounds to students at nursery schools.

(3) Our empirical English teaching experiences

We proposed to start teaching English from nursery schools. Here we show this reason based on our empirical English teaching experiences. While I was studying at Ph. D. Program, University of Hawaii at Manoa from late 1970s to early 1980s, I and my wife had four children. I and my wife were Japanese from Japan, not local Hawaii; so, we spoke Japanese at home. However, our children played outside with friends in Hawaii; they spoke English. When they went to nursery schools and kindergartens, they were taught in English. They spoke more English than Japanese.

We came back to Japan in 1984 for teaching at Hyogo college. From now on, we mainly show the eldest child who was a 7 year – old daughter. She was in the 1st grade in Hawaii. She was admitted to the 1st grade in Japan. She faced a lot of cross-cultural problems at a Japanese school. In 3 months she started to speak Japanese. We wanted to keep her English; so, we started to listen to English songs and stories at breakfast each day. This was just like background music. Then we encouraged them to take English Proficiency Test (Eiken).

When they went to the junior high school, they started to learn English. They got good scores for mid-term and final exams; they had confidence in English, especially listening test. We asked them to listen to the tape of the textbook. They naturally memorized all lessons of the textbook. Then they were admitted to the English Course at Akashi-Nishi high school. While

the eldest child was at the high school, she went to study in Hawaii for 1 year. This experience improved her English ability and cross-cultural understanding. After she graduated from the high school, she was admitted to the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her TOEFL score was enough to enter; however, most Japanese students' TOEFL scores are not enough and they should take ESL classes. She majored in journalism and finished the university within 4 years. After that, she was admitted to Kobe University Graduate School (MA) to teach English. While she was at Kobe University, she worked for NHK's morning drama as program staff of Hawaiian English tutor. She also passed Eiken 1st. She got perfect score at the interview test; so, she was awarded by President of Japanese Chamber Commerce. After she had several working experiences at private companies, she was admitted to Kyoto University Graduate School (Ph. D.) to teach English. She is presenting her papers at several academic conferences now. When we compare my learning with her learning, she has more sense of English. From her learning experience, she is a native speaker of English. This shows we can make native speakers of English if we start to teach English from nursery schools and kindergartens.

Thus we propose a curriculum to teach English at nursery schools. We chose nursery schools because they open from Monday to Saturday. At nursery Schools we teach the rule or moral as a human in the global society both in English and Japanese with CD for 10 Minutes every day. The same thing is for English songs. We can introduce stories too. Here is a key point. If students know outline of the story, it is easier to teach because they know story in Japanese already. They can enjoy the difference between English and Japanese.

(4) Conclusion

We proposed to raise ranking of Japanese English ability from starting teaching English from nursery schools. The recent brain studies show my daughter verified this validity. My empirical English teaching experience shows importance of brain studies. We proposed an approach of "how we teach English to students at nursery schools." Next step is to make a curriculum including moral, songs and story. Thus we want to contribute to raise a global leader.

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